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THE CONSOLE.*

By Dr. P. F. KRELL.

The Renaissance passed into the Rococo style, in which artistic liberty strayed beyond the limits of the Permitted into those of the Possible. All those parts of architecture which till now were kept purely constructive were transformed into representations of organic shapes which if they even adhered to architectonic principles did so only in an arbitrary manner. Thus straight lines disappeared wherever it was possible, and those subordinate architectural features which were hitherto legitimate conventional ornaments were now on the contrary treated as mere decorations. The Console shared this fate, and the Rococo style, which ever aimed at the greatest possible richness of decoration, made a most immoderate use of it. Under door-cornices, or windowsills, on keystones, chimneypieces, etc., it never failed to make its appearance, while in the principal cornice, at least in the most flourishing period of the Rococo, it was less employed, especially in the strict form of horizontal modillions, which made a stand against unbridled license. If the principal cornice was to be furnished at all with Consoles they took the upright form like ancones, and were often seen in pairs, or disposed on each side of a square panel on a perpendicular wall in order to allow garlands to be hung between them on the panel; more frequently however the panelling is dispensed with, and a larger interval between the single or double consoles is preferred.

In general, as the typical form of the Console, the double volute was retained, which indeed agreed most with the wild contorsions and confusion of lines which mark this style. But as these, as we have before remarked, had lost their constructive character and ap-

peared now only as mere decoration, they no longer showed their former vigorous form and roundness, and were made flat, as if through a pressure from in front (figs. 21 to 23) and later, at least in the upper volute, through the pressure above, fig. 24, so that the spiral took an elliptical shape. (This elliptical form was however also adopted as being out of the common.) Moreover, the Console considered as a mere decoration often projected without any constructive purpose beyond the cornice, of which it represented the support, fig. 22. When, as in figs. 22 and 23, they pass across mouldings, strings and cornices, instead of intersecting them, they give the idea of entirely incongruous ornaments. In accordance with the richness of the style, there was always introduced between them and the cornice a number of small mouldings. The further alterations in the form of the double volute, which took place in the Renaissance style, the diminishing or tapering of the back surface, the curving of the border lines, the fluting of the back and the screw-like projection of the spiral were still more apparent in the Rococo style, figs. 22 and 23. Not content with this, the ogee-like profile of the Console was sometimes broken under the upper spiral as in fig. 23 the under spiral was also left out, but replaced in a different manner from the Renaissance, generally by a scroll ornament, shell or escutcheon, fig. 23, which also sometimes replaced the larger spiral. The inverted volute also appears, so that what was formerly the front is turned to the wall; lastly the spirals, if there are two, are screwed up towards one and the same side.

The decoration of the back surface was now executed in the greatest variety of ways, either by simple or ornamented ribs and edges, figs. 21 and 22, or by shell-like orna-

* Conclusion from p. 161 ante.

ments or flutings, fig. 23, or even by a combination of all these. In the time of Louis XVI, when there was a remarkable return to the antique, an acanthus leaf covering the perpendicular part of the front surface, is sometimes met with, and the running pattern of antique leaves for the rest of the upper parts, fig. 24, both which motives are borrowed from the horizontal Corinthian cornice console but employed in an incongruous manner. In the antique upright Console, the ancone of the Ionic doorway, the honey-suckle applied to the upper part of the front surface was drawn according to the direction of the spiral, i. e., downwards, whereas in fig. 24, the leaf below in the angle of the small spiral has its direction upwards. The upper wreath of leaves appears on that account of unseemly arrangement because we necessarily keep in mind the decoration in the example before us continued under the acanthus leaf through the whole front surface, which is not the case with the Corinthian cornice console.

Not less superficial and in a great measure absurd are the plant ornaments in figs. 21 and 22, represented as growing partly upwards and partly downwards on one and the same volute. An additional decoration of the volute is the upper corner leaf or crowning ornament, figs. 21, 22, 23; the lower corner leaf on the contrary has been changed into a pendent bouquet of leaves and flowers, figs. 22, 23, or into the Roman Doric guttæ with hanging buds, fig. 21. Fig. 24 returns rather in this respect to what was thought to be the antique type, being in reality the Renaissance shape. In proportion as the front view is rich, the sides are kept simple, the spiral band is throughout plain, and the empty triangular space either filled up only with simple hatchings as in figs. 22 and 24, or with an insignificant flower, fig. 23.

In the first period of the Rococo various kinds of fruits and plant leaves, among them the acanthus, were used as decorations, figs. 21 and 22, but not, as we have remarked, growing out of any organic necessity suggested by the form of the console on which they are merely stuck. The elegant and delicate ornamentation of the Renaissance was exchanged for a more obtrusive one aiming only at strong effects. This peculiarly fantastic and wild treatment was owing partly to the great influence which, in the course of time, furniture and stucco-work had obtained in architecture. Hence also the plant-ornaments were by degrees supplanted by a confusion of wreaths and scroll-work more allied to plasterer and joiner's work, which now covered every possible space in the easiest fashion with scrolls, an example of which is shown in the lower part of fig. 23. Shells, stones cut in facets and heads like those in the Renaissance console of Heidelberg Castle illustrated above, and draperies which were drawn across the Console from one volute to another are other most favorite motives of ornament in the time of Louis XV.

Besides these Console types, we have to mention one of singular appearance which, proceeding on an affectation of the antique, adopted as a prominent feature

the slender Roman Doric triglyphs, with the upper parts sometimes in volute form.

Our readers may think that we have devoted comparatively too much space to examples of the Rococo style; but this is not because we hold them in higher estimation, but because this style of architecture, as we have already pointed out, is most especially appropriate for affording designs for furniture and other articles; of the application of the Console to these, we shall have occasion to speak below.

Modern art was marked at first by a remarkable deterioration of form, then by a return to the antique, which however was accompanied by a frigidity of style which continues to the present day. More lately recourse was again had to the forms of the Renaissance and Rococo, as possessing that element of fantasy in which our present productions are so deficient. The more intelligent artists however, well aware of the high value to be derived, even for Renaissance Art, from an intelligent study of the antique from which we cannot part, take advantage of it to place some limits to the exuberant creations of fantasy, and to produce more constructive and organic forms than those of the Renaissance. We remark this endeavour in many modern specimens, as for instance in fig. 25, composed after a Renaissance motive in the form of a suspended triangle, and again fig. 26, designed more after the antique, showing more freedom of decoration, serving for a balcony support. But, although not deficient in design, these carvings are often devoid of the great charm which lies in the spirited workmanship and execution of the works of the antique and Renaissance, our present architectural carvers not devoting themselves in the same degree to the study of nature which distinguished the ancients and the master artists of the Renaissance who were not unfrequently formed in the workshops of the Goldsmith. Besides which we in the North have to deal with another material which demands less delicate forms.

If we have now dwelt with sufficient clearness on the development of the Console into architecture, it remains that we say a few words about its connection with furniture and articles of household use. The strictly monumental forms of architecture unless differently treated are by no means suitable to these, and were considered by the ancients, and especially by the Greeks, as too sacred to be applied to articles of common use. The same applies to the Console. It is not until the more pretentious and deteriorated periods of Art that we find the dentil-band and the cornice consoles directly applied in diminished proportions but solely for the decoration of the interior. In mediæval art, wood-work might without any difficulty have borrowed the form of the corbel from architecture, which endeavoured to rival every other material in its artistic carvings and pierced works in stone. The Renaissance, not without incongruity of treatment, transferred, sometimes in an outwardly beautiful and harmonious manner, a pilaster arrangement in diminished proportion, to their furniture surfaces, and with it the Console both as a support for cornice and pilasters,

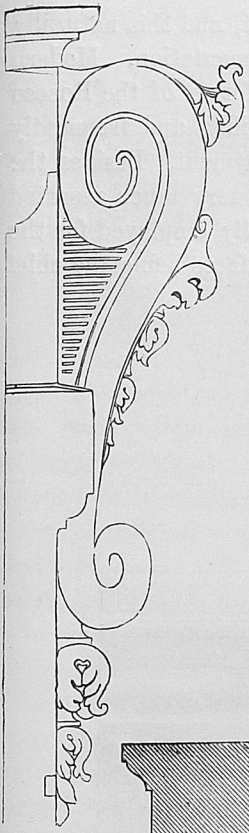


Fig. 22.

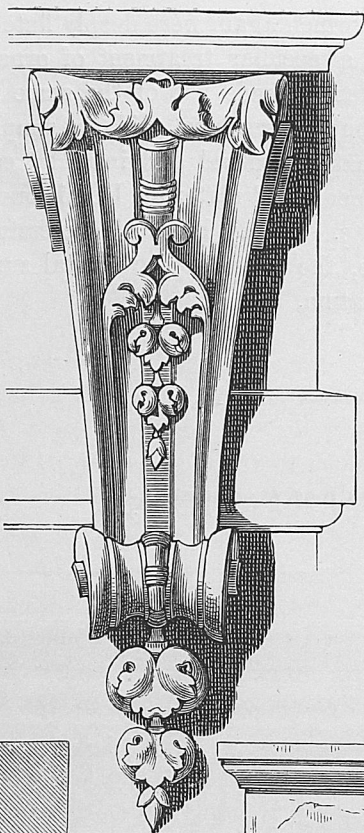


Fig. 22.

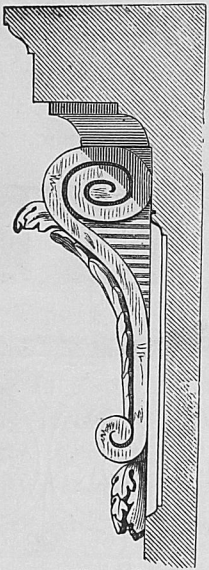


Fig. 24.

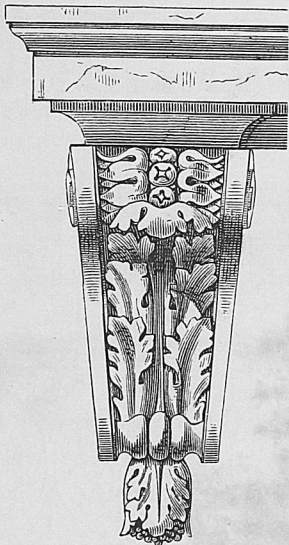


Fig. 24.

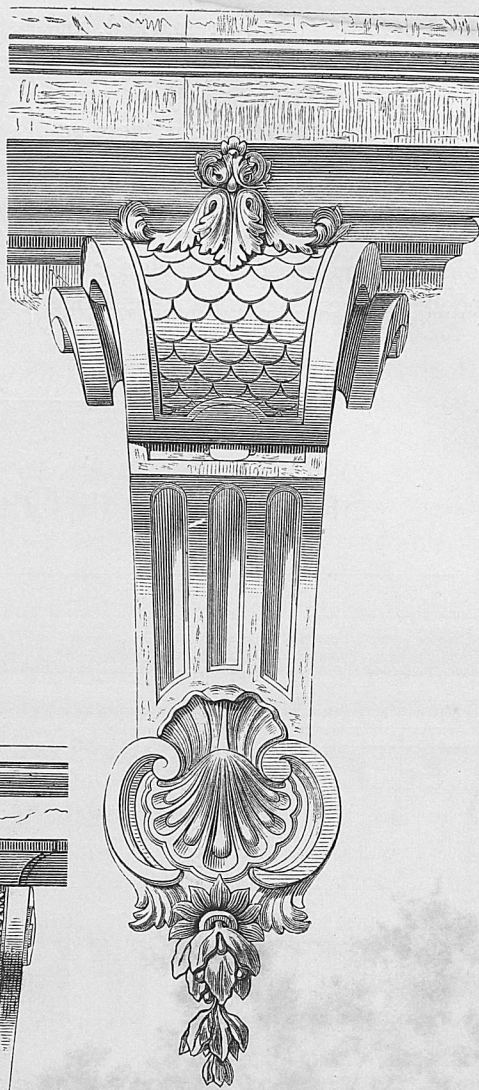


Fig. 23.

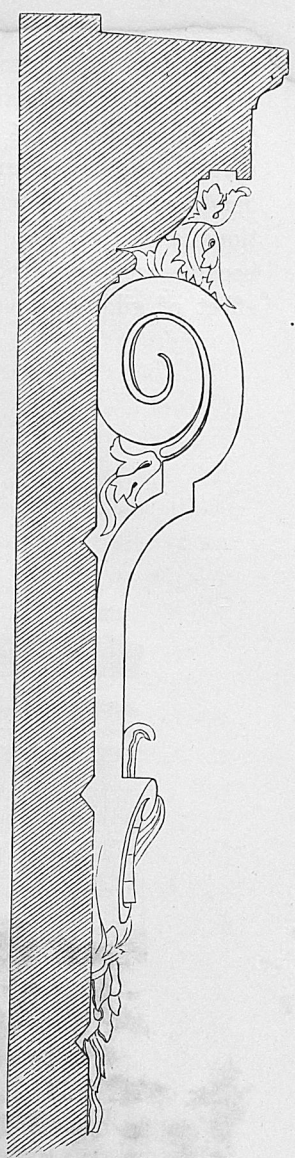


Fig. 23.

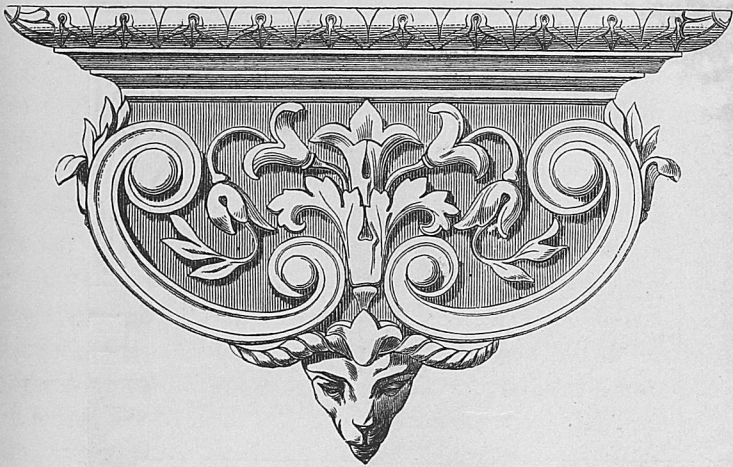


Fig. 25.

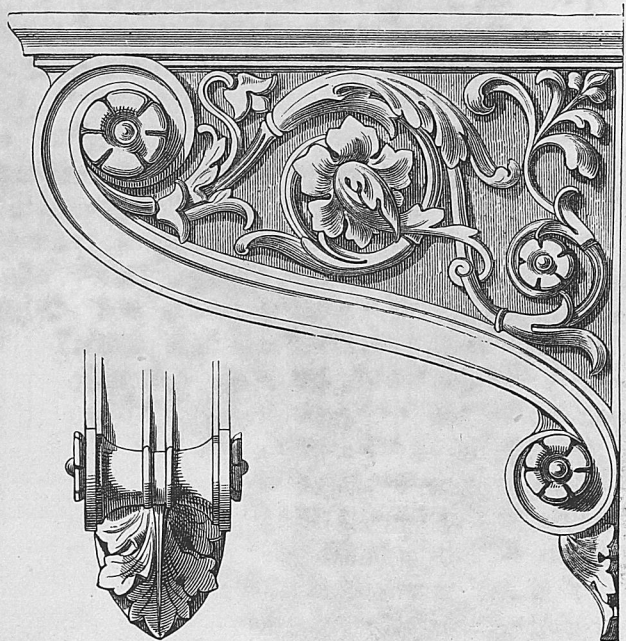


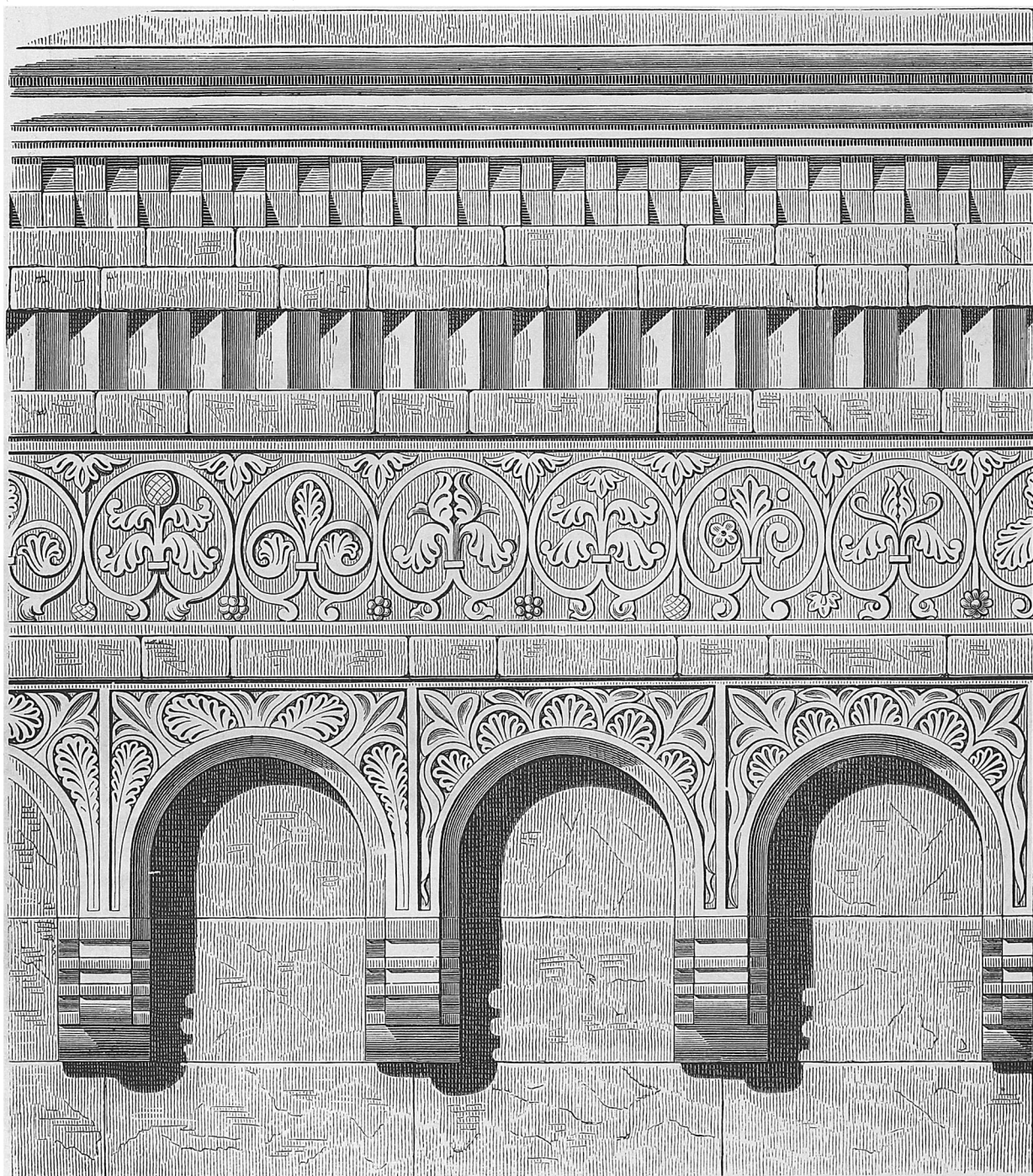
Fig. 26.

- Fig. 22. Console of the time of Louis XV.
 Fig. 23. Console of the time of Louis XIV.
 Fig. 24. Console of the time of Louis XVI.
 Fig. 25. Console supporting a Pilaster.
 Fig. 26. Balcony Console.

In the Rococo style, as we have already remarked, interior decoration gave the tone to the rest, and due consideration was paid to the material, whether wood, stucco, papier-maché, porcelain, ivory, etc. As these generally were afterwards gilt, parts of them remaining dead, while other parts, especially the principal projections and the deep hollows, were highly polished, it became an object to obtain forms most favorable for the effect of gilding, rounded surfaces somewhat resembling

shields, which again were deeply fluted, and this naturally led to a peculiar treatment of ornamentation. Modern Art-Industry made use of the same forms of the Rococo style, but, as we have said, in simplified and frequently somewhat superficial and insipid treatment. Besides the above mentioned materials Iron is one very much resorted to of late. It may be most successfully employed for the Console, the effect of the lateral surfaces being the chief desideratum.

SPECIMENS OF ORNAMENTATION.



No. 1. From Verona. Twelfth century. Crowning Cornice of the Aisles of San Zeno Basilica.